

PRESS STATEMENT

Date:

On Behalf of: Break O' Day Catchment Risk Group

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Thirty one scientists and medical practitioners have asked the Tasmanian State Government to follow the European Union's precautionary approach and ban pesticides harmful to health.

In an open letter to the State Minister for Health, Lara Giddings and the Minister for Primary Industry and Water, David Llewellyn, 31 scientists and doctors have requested the Government to prohibit the use of all pesticides that adversely affect health along the lines defined by the recent EU directive regarding pesticides.

The reason for this request is that cancer rates in Tasmania have dramatically increased between 1980 and 2005. The age standardised incidence rates (ASR) of all cancers (excluding non-melanoma skin cancers) increased by 33% for males and 30% for females during this period and they are continuing to rise.

Tasmania is now rated as having the highest age-adjusted rate of cancer (excluding skin cancer) in Australia (433.9 per 100,000 people). This is highly significant.

Increasing rates of acute illness, (including diabetes and cancer) in this state have coincided with the increased use of many dangerous pesticides in plantations and farmland.

The link between pesticides and many forms of illness (e.g. some cancers, Parkinson's disease) have long been known, there is increasing evidence linking miniscule doses (parts per trillion) of pesticides to endocrine disruption and some cancers. Endocrine disruption can result in a range of illnesses and has been linked to breast, testicular and prostate cancer, as well as impaired fertility, miscarriages, fibroids and reduced testosterone in men, leading to lower sperm counts and demasculinisation. It is likely that the unusually high rate of prostate cancer in Tasmania (the highest in the nation, even after accounting for age) is linked to exposure to these chemicals.

Only a fraction of the many hundreds of pesticides registered for use in Australia have been tested for health risks. In addition, there is no official monitoring program that links pesticide use to human or environmental health.

Testing carried out by the Department of Primary Industry and Water on 55 rivers in the state show many of our rivers that supply drinking water now contain pesticides that are banned in the European Union.

Unlike the passive smoker, almost everyone in Tasmania is at risk as a passive consumer of these poisons.

ENDS.